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Conditions in Mexico for Working Women Discussed at UNH

By [Erika Mantz](#)
UNH News Bureau

April 10, 2001

DURHAM, N.H. -- Two members of the Maquila Organizing Project will participate in a panel discussion at the University of New Hampshire Monday, April 16, from 3 to 4:30 p.m. on the conditions faced by women workers in Mexican factories and the ways they are organizing for dignity on the job. The role of women in their communities and how their contributions are valued are key indicators of the possibility for successful, sustainable development.

"Maquila Organizing: A Global Perspective" with Elisa Ortega Villa and Leticia Mendoza Garcia will be held in the Memorial Union Building, room 330-332. The program is free and open to the public.

A former pastoral outreach worker, Ortega is coordinator of the Maquila Organizing Project in Mexico, which helps women gain legal skills, build solidarity networks and improve their working conditions and living standards. Mendoza was a machine operator at Sewgood Industries, and as an active union member she worked for basic rights, like realistic quotas, overtime pay and the right to use the bathroom when needed.

Maquilas or "maquiladoras" are export-oriented assembly factories, most of whose workers are women laboring under sweatshop conditions.

The American Friends Service Committee, which is sponsoring the speakers tour, believes that discussion of trade agreements like NAFTA should include the perspective of workers who are affected.

"NAFTA contributed to a loss of industrial jobs in the U.S., and to a swelling of jobs in Mexico," says Arnie Alpert, a member of the American Friends Service

Committee, "but employers there have denied basic human rights to their workers. These are the women who are doing something about it."

The panel discussion is sponsored by the Office of Sustainability Programs, the President's Commission on the Status of Women, the Anthropology Department and the American Friends Service Committee. For more information, call (603) 862-1058.

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